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SOCIAL WORK AND INFLUENCE OF THE NEGRO CHURCH

By R. R. WRIGHT, JR.,
Special Fellow in Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

The term "Negro Church" is here used to designate that portion of organized Christian teaching which is conducted exclusively by Negroes among the members of their race. In their Church relations the Negro race is perhaps more distinctly separate from the people at large than in any other important social relation, the mass of them being members of organizations managed and supported entirely by the members of their own race, often with but little co-operation with the rest of the Christian world. Being so separated, there is no institution among Negroes which lends itself to more thorough and profitable study. In this paper I shall touch briefly upon the social work and influence of the general church and of the local church, and shall point out some lines along which more effective work might be done.

I. *The Social Work of the General Church*

(1) One of the indications of influence is membership. The figures of the twelfth census are not available; but, according to the eleventh census, taken in 1890, there were 2,673,977 communicants of Negro churches, or about thirty-six per cent of all the Negroes in the country, and about forty-nine per cent of those of ten years of age and over.

These figures, however, represent a smaller number than the aggregate Negro membership of the Christian Church in the United States, for many thousands of Negroes were not reported: some, members of distinctively Negro churches, such as Baptists in the North, and some Methodists, and others, members of churches not distinctively colored, such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Catholics, etc., especially in the North. It is probable that forty per cent of the Negroes of the country were members of churches in 1890, and the same percentage may hold for to-day.

(2) *Organizations.*—Churches have existed among Negroes in America from the seventeenth century, and Negroes have had their separate local churches from the middle of the eighteenth century. But the first general church organization was in 1816, when the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, at Philadelphia, by sixteen delegates, representing churches at Philadelphia, Baltimore, Md., Salem, N. J., and Attleboro, Pa. In 1820 the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was formed at New York by representatives from Negro congregations in New York, Philadelphia, New Haven and Long Island. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was formed from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1870, at Jackson, Tenn. The Baptists formed a general organization called the National Baptist Convention in 1892. There are more than a dozen other minor Negro church organizations. The strength of the principal ones is shown in the following table, taken from the eleventh census and from the Budget of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for 1902:

Denomination.	When Established.	Churches.	Communi- cants, 1890.	Churches, 1902.	Members, 1902.
African Methodist Episcopal.....	1816	2,481	452,725	5,904	762,580
A. M. E. Zion.....	1820	1,704	349,788	4,106	575,271
American Union Methodist .....	..	40	3,475	250	16,500
Colored Methodist Episcopal	1870	1,759	129,383	1,649	209,972
Regular Baptists .....	..	12,946	1,384,861	..	1,615,321

These organizations do not differ materially in doctrine and polity from similar denominations among whites. They were formed largely because the white Christians did not permit their Negro brethren to take equal part with them in the feast or sacrament of the Lord's Supper and in the government of the Church. They are governed entirely by Negroes. The Methodist bodies have their general conferences every four years and elect their executive officers. At present the African Methodist Episcopal Church has thirteen bishops elected for life and eleven general officers, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion ten bishops and seven general officers, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church has seven bishops. The Baptist churches are independent of any control; but the National Baptist Convention elects officers to supervise various general activities, such as missions, education, etc.

(3) *Work and Influence in Education.*—The most conspicuous

general social work of these churches is in education. The Church was the pioneer in the educational field among Negroes. The first school established for higher training of Negroes was Wilberforce University, in Ohio, in 1856. In 1863 this school became the exclusive property of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and its first president was Daniel A. Payne, a Negro, who was forty years a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Since then this church has organized an educational department and spent nearly two million dollars for the education of the race. Most of the leaders in this movement, and the founders of the Negro schools named below, were ex-slaves, and many of them came to manhood without the ability to read and write. The attempts of these people, utterly unused to culture, and knowing chiefly by hearsay the value of education, form one of the brightest pages of the early history of the South after the Civil War. The exact number of schools maintained by Negro religious denominations has not been obtained, but the following list of those established, maintained and managed by the African Methodist Episcopal Church will give some idea of what Negroes are doing through their churches. In 1902 there were 25 schools, having 160 teachers, 51 buildings and 1,482 acres of land, valued at \$658,000, and an average attendance of over 4,500. The principal schools are:

Name of Principal Schools of the A. M. E. Church.	Location.	Estab- lished.	Teachers.	Pupils.
Wilberforce University	Greene County, Ohio...	1856	20	311
Morris Brown College	Atlanta, Ga.	1880	17	350
Allen University	Columbia, S. C.	1880	8	351
Paul Quinn College	Waco, Texas	1881	8	223
Edward Waters College	Jacksonville, Fla.	1883	5	220
Shorter Institute	Little Rock, Ark.	1887	4	110
Turner Normal Institute	Shelbyville, Tenn.	1887	?	?
Kittrell College	Kittrell, N. C.	1886	14	214
Wayman Institute	Herrodsburg, Ky.	1891	?	?
Campbell College	Jackson, Miss.	1897	117	9
Western University	Quindaro, Kans. ... ..	..	10	214

Beside these institutions, there are also normal and high schools in Indian Territory, Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama and Georgia; the Payne Theological Seminary, established in 1891, at Wilberforce University, Ohio, and theological departments in Morris Brown College and Allen University.

In most cases the churches are doing the work of the state. They are furnishing very little theological training for their ministers, and but little real college training. Most of their work corresponds to that done in the public graded and normal schools. In Atlanta, Ga., for instance, a Negro church school, styled a college, has over a thousand pupils, most of whom are primary and intermediate grade pupils who really belong in the public schools of the city. But when it is known, for example, that Georgia furnishes facilities for the teaching of less than half of her Negro children, one easily sees why the Church must do the state's work, however inefficiently. In many cases the state and Church co-operate, as in Ohio and Kansas.

In these Negro denominational schools the grade of teaching varies greatly. Wilberforce University, the best one, ranks among the best Negro schools of the country. Its faculty is excellent and its graduates have made the senior college class at the University of Chicago, graduating with honorable mention.

(4) *Other Intellectual Influences.*—The first Negro newspaper of which we have knowledge was edited by a Negro minister. The oldest one now in existence is the *Christian Recorder*, the chief official organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1852, eleven years before Lincoln's emancipation proclamation went into effect. The oldest and largest Negro magazine is also published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and was established in 1882. The African Methodist Episcopal Church publishes the following periodicals, all edited and controlled by Negroes: The *Christian Recorder*, at Philadelphia, Pa.; the *Southern Christian Recorder*, Columbus, Ga.; the *Western Christian Recorder*, the *African Methodist Episcopal Review*, Philadelphia; the *Sunday School Monitor*, Nashville, Tenn.; the *African Methodist Episcopal Sunday School Quarterly* (junior and senior), at Nashville, Tenn. There are about twenty periodicals published by the Negro church organizations. The editors and publishers of these organs are among the very few Negroes in America who draw high salaries for journalistic work exclusively. Besides these regular organs of influence, there are such gatherings as the National Negro Young People's Congress, held at Atlanta and Washington; the various literary congresses of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and numerous "Normal Institutes," Sunday

school conferences and conventions which shed enlightening influences. The most largely attended gatherings of Negroes in the country have been the Young People's Congress, the National Convention of the Baptists and the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

(5) *Economic*.—Besides being religious denominations, the churches are great business enterprises. They owned in 1890 over \$25,000,000 worth of property, and to-day own probably \$40,000,000 worth. They give employment to a large number of departmental managers, called secretaries; to hundreds of teachers, typewriters, stenographers, printers, bookkeepers, clerks, teamsters and general workers, paying salaries from \$3.00 per week to \$3,000 per year. One printing house in Nashville, operated by the Baptists, employs more than one hundred and twenty persons, and does business in nearly every state in the Union. The financial department of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, being the general treasury of the organization, which is an incorporated body, has had for the past ten years an annual income of more than \$100,000 from its "Dollar Money Fund." The Church Extension Department, under a separate manager, or secretary, loans money to churches for building, buying or repairing, and thus saves the local churches from large interest and fees which they must sometimes pay, and, at the same time, keeps interest and profits inside the organization. The Connectional Preachers' Aid Association is an insurance society principally for the insurance of ministers and their families. Being co-operative, it hopes to make better terms than ordinary insurance companies. The Sunday School Union publishes all the Sunday school literature of the Church. This literature is written, printed and sold by Negroes.

At the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1904 the bishops sent forth a signed statement that in the African Methodist Episcopal Churches for one year (1903) the amount of money raised was \$3,679,471.06. If this be true, then the contributions of Negroes to Negro churches must be about \$10,000,000 per year.

(6) *Political Influence*.—It is thus seen that the Negro Church is the largest and most powerful institution among the race to-day. The Negro bishops as a group are without doubt most influential members of society. It is but natural that such an organization

wields much political influence. There is, however, no political machinery in the Church. But it is possibly not mere accident that the two Negroes who hold the highest political positions in Washington are very active members of the two largest Methodist organizations. Cut off, as Negroes are, from free political activity in the states where most of them live, there can be no doubt that many of those who might have entered the politics of the state have tried to satisfy their political ambitions for leadership in the Church. This one result of disfranchisement of Negroes is not calculated to make these great democratic ecclesiastical bodies more circumspect in the quality of their leadership.

II. *The Local Church*

The chief work of the Methodist denominations has been the building of a strong central organization, and much that might have been hoped in the way of social work by the local church has been omitted. On the other hand, the very independence and isolation of Baptists has retarded their social work. Preaching, teaching and prayer have been the principal work of the Church, except as it was forced into other things in order to sustain itself, such as giving concerts, sociables, etc., not so much for the social uplift, as to raise money to carry on the religious work.

(1) In relation to the community, however, all churches do not stand alike. *The rural church* is perhaps the least influential from the social point of view. The people are far apart and are generally densely ignorant and poor. The demands of larger centers are so great, and the compensation of the rural churches so small, that, as a rule, well prepared ministers are difficult to obtain. In only a few cases are there more than two services per month, with now and then a poorly attended prayer meeting. The pastor is often a non-resident, and if a resident must give his attention chiefly to farming or some other occupation. There are some notable exceptions, where rural ministers are well equipped and are able to do good work on Sunday and in the homes of the people during the week, but by far the majority of rural Negroes, so far as higher religious, ethical and social training is concerned, are quite neglected, and here the Church has least real influence.

(2) *The Small Town*.—Here perhaps the Church is strongest

in its influence. In the small town generally every one who lays claim to respectability is a member of the Church, or at least attends it. Often it is the only public place owned by Negroes or entirely at their disposal. It serves, in consequence, as the place of general meeting, a kind of general social club, with many minor organizations. It is the amusement bureau and the general censor of things social as well as religious. The pastor and his wife are generally the social leaders, and if they be of intelligence and high purpose, wield a most helpful influence. The church serves as the place for the introduction of strangers; it finds, presents and encourages new talent in music, dramatic art and other fields of endeavor. To the pastor is often due the sending of the bright young girls and boys off to high schools and colleges. The church serves as a kind of bureau of charities. In an unofficial way it cares for the sick and makes provision for the poor who die and the orphans. Attached to it are often benefit societies, orphan homes, and families who will take orphaned children. In the South the minister in the small town often takes the important place of the Negro lawyer. He stands for his people in court and between them and their white neighbors, and in times of racial trouble is a most valuable person in helping to restore order. Because of this influence of the church the minister wields influence in politics and business to a very great degree. He is administrator of estates, bondsman, member of boards of directors, etc. The first independent Negro bank was started in Montgomery, Ala., by an energetic Baptist minister, who, because of his position as pastor of a church, had been frequently called upon as an administrator of funds of various kinds.

(3) *The Large City.*—The Church is dominant in the small town largely because of its monopoly. In a large city things are different. The Church has no monopoly; there are larger and finer auditoriums than it can offer; there is better music than its choir can give; there are better trained men than its pastor; there is more or less of a breaking away from the traditional theology. There are one-cent newspapers, five-cent theatres and a lack of home restraints. There are public high schools, well equipped; free lectures, free libraries. There is, above all, the hard, nerve-racking struggle for existence; a greater difference between rich and poor; and for Negroes, there is often unsteady employment and

high rents. The saloon is often dominant in politics, and the forces of vice can be of more immediate pecuniary aid to the poor than those of the Church. In many cases, instead of having a monopoly on the Sabbath day, it must compete with theatres, skating rinks, baseball games, saloons, pool rooms, race tracks and amusement gardens, as well as with Sunday labor and Sunday picnics and society functions. Still, it is exactly under these conditions that we have the largest and apparently most successful Negro churches. In New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, New Orleans and other cities there are Negro churches whose membership is from 1,000 to 2,500 persons, and in more than one of them scores of people are found standing every Sunday. While many are complaining of not being able to reach working men in the large cities, Negro churches are composed almost entirely of working men, and there is not room enough. In Chicago, for example, in certain districts, Negroes have bought, since 1900, seven churches formerly owned by whites, paying as high as \$30,000 for one of them.

The large Negro churches are filled, not because of social work, but almost invariably because of the personality of the pastors and their peculiar method of preaching. As a rule, these churches have men of strong and magnetic personality. They know their people better perhaps than any one else, and know what will draw them. They seldom lack a large following. But in many cases the following is only personal, and with a change in pastors there has often been an almost entire change in personnel of the congregation.

These churches have, one would think, a very large opportunity for social work. But there is but little systematic work of that sort among them. They give alms, help bury the dead, care for the sick, take part in politics, have numerous concerts and entertainments; many have social clubs; some have libraries, and all are to some degree employment bureaus. They do an immense amount of unsystematized charity and social work, but it is largely done to secure money to pay Church debts and not for the social uplift. These churches are run chiefly on the small town church plan, with everything proportionately greater than in the small town. The ministration is chiefly of the same sort as in the small town; but the city minister is as a rule the superior. The result is that the

great mass of Negroes who are migrating to the large cities (and twice as many Negroes as white in proportion to population are going to the large cities) are attracted to the Church, which is a part of their old environment transplanted to the new place. They join the church and fill it. But as they become accustomed to the life of the city, as the new factors begin to influence their living, they begin to fall away from the Church. But this falling away goes on unnoticed by the casual observer, who sees only the large congregations gathered each Sunday. The fact is that as fast as the old members fall out newcomers to the city take their places, and they are not missed. A good illustration of this is afforded by one of the largest Negro churches in Chicago, which six years ago had about 1,300 members; during the six years over 1,800 new members were received, but at the present time it has about 1,500 members. The other 1,600 are accounted for by a few deaths and removals, but chiefly by the dropping out of those who have felt the force of the new city environment. In the same city a pastor of a large congregation said that after being away from the church three years, he finds upon visiting it that very few of the faces are familiar to him. The large accessions to the churches are from the newly-arrived immigrants.

One easily sees that there is an increasing and largely untouched problem of the old inhabitant and the native born city Negro. Of this latter class—the native city Negro—there are not large numbers. At present the city Negro is chiefly the Negro born in the rural districts or the small town. Only a few churches have, therefore, attacked the problems of the real city Negroes. Seven years ago the African Methodist Episcopal Church made a definite attempt to minister to the city environment through the specially established Institutional Church in Chicago. As the name implied, the object of this church was to so combine social and religious work as not only to reach the newcomers to Chicago, but all classes, and to serve its local community regardless of the church affiliations of the individuals making it up. Its ideal was that of social service rather than emotionalism and mere unorganized enthusiasm. But from the beginning there was a clash of ideals, and the undertaking was looked at with scant approval by those who still held the small town ideals.

That the wisest of the leaders of the Negro churches in the

large cities see the need of ministering to the larger social needs of the Negroes who flock to their midst there is increasing evidence. The following sketch of one church which has been foremost in social work in Philadelphia will illustrate a tendency. The church is the Berean Presbyterian Church, established in 1880. Its pastor and founder is a graduate of Oberlin College and Princeton Theological Seminary, and was for two years a graduate student at Yale. His church has been from the beginning outside of any one of the city's "black belts," but its work has reached every portion of Philadelphia. Besides its regular church, Sabbath school, missionary and young people's religious work it has attacked in a most sensible and admirable manner some of the economic problems of Negro city life. In 1884 its free kindergarten was started and has been maintained ever since. In 1888 the building and loan association was started to give assistance in one of the most important phases of Negro city life. The association has now over 550 members and has issued 6,558½ shares of stock; has assisted in the purchase of 145 homes at an average value of \$2,100; has paid back to stockholders \$84,450 on matured stock. The present assets are \$122,326.80, while the value of real estate owned by stockholders and acquired through the association is \$304,500. Not only the housing question has been thus successfully dealt with, but the work question—probably the most serious problem of the city Negro. One of the Negro's chief difficulties is lack of training and lack of opportunity to secure it. To meet this, the Berean Manual Training and Industrial School was established on a small scale in 1899, enrolling fifty pupils the first year. Now it has more than two hundred pupils, and gives instruction in carpentry, upholstery, millinery, practical electricity, plain sewing and dressmaking, stenography, cooking, waiting, tailoring and some academic branches. There are twenty officers and teachers, more than one thousand students have attended and seventy-five have graduated. Another activity has regard to securing work. In 1897 the Bureau of Mutual Help was established, whereby employer and employee could be brought together without extra expense to either. Through this bureau many workers in domestic service and many housekeepers have been benefited. Another step in this direction was made in 1906, when the Berean Trades Association was formed to seek out and aid Negroes qualified in the skilled

trades. Besides these activities, there are the Berean Seaside Home, a resort near Asbury Park, N. J., for respectable colored persons; the Berean Educational Conference, established in 1900, and the Berean Seaside Conference, established in 1904. All of these activities grew out of the work of the Church, are fostered by it, bear its name, but are separate and distinct from it, making it possible for any one to secure benefit from them without obligating him to the Presbyterian creed. The object seems to be to serve men, rather than to get members, and though the church proper has only 250 members, its solid influence has been seen in the lives of thousands of citizens who have been helped to respectability and godliness.

III. *The Need of Social Work*

The necessity for social work among Negroes does not need to be established. Take Philadelphia as an example, with its 80,000 Negroes. Half of these are without home attachments, and many of them live in furnished rooms. Here and in the vicinity are 40,000 domestic servants more than half of whom are women. Here is an excess of women and an unusually large number of unmarried persons. On the work side there is need for training, and much of it; there is need for opening opportunities for trained Negro men, many of whom have the doors closed to them merely on account of color, and there are a hundred other needs. On the leisure side there is the amusement question. The dance halls and the pool rooms are far more popular than the Sunday school or the class meeting or Christian Endeavor, and the dance halls and pool rooms are as a rule in the hands of bad men. The church concert, which is so popular in small towns, is not attractive when compared with the cheap theater; the saloons are open from twelve to eighteen hours a day, providing music, lunch, reading matter, tables, toilet, telephone, pen and ink and many conveniences to this homeless city lodger; but the church is closed tight, except for about one hour during the day—the pastor's office hour—and two to three hours at night. On the physical side, there is no gymnasium for 40,000 Negro men in Philadelphia, and the Young Men's Christian Associations of most large cities bar Negroes from their gymnasiums; there is no swimming pool, and at least 20,000 Negroes in this city bathe in wash basins and small laundry tubs. Then there

is the great social danger in the transition from small town and rural life to city life, which threatens the moral ruin of those making the change.

I do not urge that Negro churches should go into the dance hall, pool room, gymnasium, employment bureau, trade school, night school and bath house businesses, but, having the ear and heart at least of the newcomers, the Church, with its leaders, who have the confidence of these people, can do much to better conditions. It can do so first by realizing its situation in a great city and the transition through which it and its members are going, by always holding up and contending for the highest religious and social ideals, by helping the municipal government to see its social duty and creating a desire for higher things in their communicants. Next to the teaching of high ideals, the churches can put some of them into practice. There is no doubt that the Church must revise its teaching regarding amusements and adopt not merely a negative but a positive position. The Negro church in the city might well take lessons from the Young Men's Christian Association.

There are, however, many obstacles to the best social work. In the first place, there is the rapidly growing Negro city population, causing churches to be easily filled and thus blinding many to the lack of real progress. Then there is the poverty of the Negroes, who already contribute enormous sums to their churches, many of which are greatly in debt. The cost of active, systematic city social missionary work is practically prohibitive. Another hindrance lies in the difficulty of securing co-operation between the various denominations. The Baptists keep largely to themselves, the African Methodists to themselves, the Zionists to themselves, while the Presbyterians and Episcopalians are largely working in isolation from the rest. Concerted action, such as is needed in a great city, is almost impossible. Another difficulty is the religious ideals of the mass of Negroes, which are chiefly emotional and connected so much more with heaven and hell than with earth and daily life, that they look with dissatisfaction upon anything in the Church which merely pertains to earthly affairs, or in which emotional enthusiasm does not predominate. This is the problem which is most difficult for progressive Negro ministers in charge of large congregations. Another difficulty, especially in the Methodist churches, is the brevity of the pastor's tenure. The itinerant

system makes any extended social work impossible; hence there is probably less of this work in the local Negro Methodist church than in any other.

In the rural districts the need is chiefly for men and leisure. For a long time to come these men must have other support than that which the poor communities can give them. Otherwise, they will not be able to exist. As a rule, Negro laymen are receiving more and better educational training than Negro ministers. The churches themselves put ten times as much stress upon general education as upon the education of their ministers, if we are to judge from the financial aid given their theological and other schools. The lack of special training, together with the increasing opportunities for Negroes in other and more lucrative employments, threatens to make the ministry, and consequently the Church, proportionately weaker, socially, if not indeed spiritually, in the future than it has been in the past.